AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1-14 (Canceled)

15. (New) A process for the preparation of anisotropic aggregates of silica comprising the stages of:

a) contacting at least one polymer with silica particles which are nonaggregated and/or which exhibit a high degree of dispersion in an aqueous medium, with a ratio R, weight of polymer with respect to the surface area of the silica particles, of between 0.02 and 2 mg/m^2, the value of the electrostatic charge of the surface of the silica particles being greater than or equal to the value of the charge of the surface of the silica particles measured in an aqueous phase without added salts at a pH of greater than or equal to 7; and

b) consolidating the aggregates obtained in stage a), either by a heat treatment or by precipitation of an inorganic compound.

16. (New) The process as claimed in claim 15, wherein stage a) is carried out with a ratio R, weight of polymer to surface area of the silica particles, of between 0.05 and 1.8 mg/m^2.

17. (New) The process as claimed in claim 15, wherein in stage a), the silica particles are added by means of a silica sol for which the size of the silica particles is between 3 and 50 nm, optionally between 5 and 20 nm.

18. (New) The process as claimed in one of the preceding claims, wherein in stage a), the polymer is a homopolymer, copolymer, linear polymer, dendrimer or grafted polymer.

19. (New) The process as claimed in claim 18, wherein the polymer is: polyoxyethylene (POE), poly(vinyl alcohol) (PVA), polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP), polyacrylamide (PAM), polymethacrylamides, poly(N-isopropylacrylamide) (PNIPAM), polysaccharides, amylase, dextran, guar, modified celluloses, polyvinylpyrrolidone-poly(acrylic acid) (PVP-PAA), polyoxyethylene-poly(acrylic acid) (POE-PAA), polyacrylamide-polyvinylpyrrolidone (PAM-PVP), poly-vinylamine, polydiallyldimethylammonium (PDADMAC), polyacrylamide-polydiallyldimethylammonium (PAM-PDADMAC), polymer based on quaternized or nonquaternized amines, polyethyleneimine, polyethyleneimine copolymer with nonionic or anionic monomers, polyvinylimidazole, poly(aminoalkyl acrylate), poly(aminoalkyl methacrylate), random copolymer of an anionic monomer with a cationic or nonionic monomer, grafted copolymer of an anionic monomer with a cationic or nonionic monomer, or a carboxymethylated polysaccharide.

20. (New) The process as claimed in claim15, wherein, in stage b), a heat treatment is further carried out at a temperature of at least 80°C, optionally of at least 120°C.

21. (New) The process as claimed in claim15 wherein, in stage b), a precipitation of an inorganic compound chosen from silicates, phosphates, silicophosphates,

aluminates, silicoaluminates, cerium, zinc, iron, titanium, zirconium, carbonates, rare earths, divalent cations or their mixtures is further carried out.

22. (New) The process as claimed in claim 21, wherein the inorganic compound is a sodium silicate exhibiting an SiO_2/Na_2O ratio by weight Rw of between 0.5 and 4.

23. (New) The process as claimed in claim 21, wherein the precipitation of the silicate is carried out by simultaneously adding the silicate to be precipitated and an acidifying agent, so as to maintain the pH at a value of at least 6.

24. (New) The process as claimed in claim 23, wherein an acidifying agent is further added.

25. (New) The process as claimed in claim 24, wherein the acidifying agent is sulfuric acid, nitric acid, hydrochloric acid, acetic acid, formic acid or carbonic acid.

26. (New) The process as claimed in claim 15, wherein the polymer is poly(N-isopropylacrylamide).

27. (New) An aggregate of silica comprising a sequence of individual silica particles for which the number of particles is between 5 and 15, for which at least 80% of the individual particles are in contact with at most 2 particles and for which the greatest distance measurable between 2 points of the aggregate is less than or equal to 5 times the mean size of an individual particle.

28. (New) A reinforcing filler for a composition formed of polymers, plastics or of rubber, viscosifying, texturizing or anticaking agent, anticracking agent,

polishing agent, coating agent, active material absorbent, catalyst support or component for battery separators, comprising an aggregate as defined in claim 27.